

Testimony of Patricia Willard, RDN
06/05/14

Opposition to House Bill 4688

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee today. I would like to speak to you briefly about Medical Nutrition Therapy for our citizens of Michigan.

Medical Nutrition Therapy, abbreviated as MNT is described as the role of nutrition in the prevention and treatment of chronic disease such as diabetes, heart disease, and kidney disease. It involves the nutritional care of critically ill patients, including techniques of nutrition support.

To be eligible for these services a patient with Medicare must have the diagnosis of diabetes, kidney disease, kidney transplant within the last 3 years, or be referred by their Medical Provider. Medicare Part B covers Medical Nutrition Therapy services which are most often provided by a Registered Dietitian.

I don't want to spend a lot of my time addressing federal government regulations, but let me say that the regulations have recognized the propriety of incorporating the Registered Dietitian in Medicare Part B. The American Medical Association as well as national diabetes and kidney associations comprehends the importance and value of the Registered Dietitian when they refer their critically ill patients for MNT.

In light of my brief review of the importance of having a qualified, educated and trained professional to provide safe and science based nutritional education, I would like to share a recent experience that I had which demonstrates the direct opposite.

Several months ago I was speaking to an individual who is employed at an exercise facility. The individual works as a Fitness Trainer. His responsibilities include providing assistance to his customers in planning and executing exercise routines. Knowing my credentials as a Registered Dietitian, the Fitness Trainer shared his contribution of providing nutrition instruction to his customers for the purpose of health and weight loss. The Paleolithic Diet. Also referred to as the Paleo Diet, the Caveman Diet, the Stone Age Diet, and the Hunter-gatherer Diet - it is a nutrition plan based on the diet of our ancestors during a time period that ended approximately 10,000 years ago. I asked the Trainer if he realized that this diet eliminated several food groups which resulted in an intake deficient in key nutrients, several being calcium and fiber. He was not aware of this. I went on to inform this individual of the liability of providing nutrition related recommendations to his customers and the possibility of causing harm to a customer with existing medical concerns. After which, I suggested that in the future that he refer his customers to a Registered Dietitian for nutrition counseling.

Nutrition is an integrative science with the overall objective of improving the health and well-being of individuals and groups. Nutritional inquiry encompasses not only the roles of the

electrons, atoms, molecules, genes, cells, organs, and complex organisms in biological life processes but also the links between life science and health, behavior, education, population, culture, and economics.

When life finds you or your loved ones with a life-threatening illness or chronic condition which requires specific and factual nutritional intervention, seek out the expertise that that will provide you with the greatest opportunity for a successful outcome. The expert health educator will be the qualified, educated and trained professional – the Registered Dietitian.

I join my hundreds of Michigan colleagues in urging you to allow the licensure for Dietitians and Nutritionists for the health and welfare of our citizens. Thank you for your time.

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